

English Summary of the Report

"Perspectives of adolescents. Results of a survey regarding politics, religion and community within the framework of the project 'Radicalisation within the digital age'"

The research report "Perspectives of adolescents. Results of a survey regarding politics, religion and community within the framework of the project 'Radicalisation within the digital age'" (German: Perspektiven von Jugendlichen. Ergebnisse einer Befragung zu den Themen Politik, Religion und Gemeinschaft im Rahmen des Projektes „Radikalisierung im digitalen Zeitalter (RadigZ)“) is based on a quantitative youth study. The study is part of the joint project "Radicalisation within the digital age – risks, processes and strategies for prevention (RadigZ)", which is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Further information on the research questions, methods and goals of the eight subprojects that are part of RadigZ can be found at www.radigz.de/en. The youth study was developed within the framework of subproject II, carried out by the Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony, and focuses on the identification of potential risks and the identification of vulnerable groups.

The aim of the youth study was to investigate socially relevant attitudes and behaviours in the context of radicalisation. The survey was conducted in schools and provided information on a wide range of topics such as societal views and the experiences, concerns and moods of young people. The questionnaire covered various topics such as family, friends and leisure activities as well as information on personal experiences with life circumstances, violence and emotions. It focused on politics, religion and society as well as correlates with political or religious extremes.

Method and Sample

The study was an online-based quantitative survey of 9th grade pupils in which school classes in German cities of 11 different federal German states participated. The sample is not representative for Germany. The survey took place from January until December of 2018. All information was self-reported by the pupils.

- The response rate was 19.1 % for schools and 65.0 % for pupils.
- Approvals were required from 15 of the 16 federal states in order to conduct the school surveys. Surveys were conducted in eleven federal states.
- After data correction, 6,715 from the originally 6,863 questioned pupils were included in the sample.
- 52.6 % were female and 47.4 % male.
- 43.4 % of the pupils had a migration background.
- 72.4 % of the pupils lived with both of their biological parents.
- 32.7 % of the pupils lived in large cities while 15.1% lived in more rural areas.
- 57.0 % of the pupils attended a Gymnasium (A-Level), 4.0 % attend an Oberschule (common school), 24.2 % a Gesamtschule (common school), 8.3 % a Realschule (secondary school qualification), 3.7 % an integrierte Haupt- und Realschule (mix of secondary and tertiary school qualification) and 2.9% a Hauptschule (tertiary school qualification).
- 7.8 % of the pupils or their parents received welfare benefits.

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- 81.0 % of the pupils described their subjective financial situation as stable while 19.0 % described their financial situation as unstable.

Overview of essentials results

Of particular interest are young people's perspectives on society, politics, religion and society.

Politics

According to various studies, the interest of young people in politics is increasing again. The latest social movement "Fridays for Future" supports this thesis and shows that teenagers are interested in engaging with politics.

- 7.7 % of pupils had no interest at all in politics. 63.8 % showed "less" or "some" interest in politics, while 28.4 % of pupils were "strongly" or "very strongly" interested in politics.
- 51.6 % of pupils did not believe that their political involvement was meaningless, while 19.6% thought it was meaningless.
- 15.7 % of the pupils agreed "rather" or "very" with the statement that others are always treated better by the government than people like themselves.
- 58.7 % of young people felt "rather" or "very" threatened by terror and violence.
- 55.4 % of respondents felt "rather" or "very" threatened by climate change and environmental pollution.
- 30.7 % perceived xenophobia, 27.7 % rising poverty and 27.9 % immigration to Germany as a threat.

Religion

In addition to their religious denomination, pupils were asked about the importance of religion as part of their daily lives, their family and their group of friends. Religious practices and the frequency of use of different resources for religious issues were asked.

- 31.3 % of the pupils did not belong to any religious denomination. 28.2 % were Protestant, 18.9 % Catholic and 3.4 % other Christian. 14.8 % were Muslims and 0.6 % were Jews.
- 60.6 % described the importance of religion in everyday life as "completely unimportant" or "rather unimportant". 21.3 % of the pupils described their personal relevance of religion as "rather important" or "very important" in everyday life.
- Religion at home was "rather important" or "very important" for 23.2 % of the pupils. For 61.0 %, religion at home was "rather unimportant" or "unimportant".
- The majority of pupils (69.8 %) considered religion as "very unimportant" or "rather unimportant" within their group of friend groups. For 9.6 %, religion within their group of friends was "rather important" or "important".
- 60.6 % prayed at least once in the past 12 months. 19.6 % prayed at least once a week.
- 11.6 % of the pupils visited a place of worship at least once a week in the last 12 months.
- 60.1 % of the pupils have attended a religious event in the last 12 months.
- Most pupils asked their family members (45.8 %) or friends (25.2 %) if they have religious questions.

Community

In their leisure time, teenagers are engaged in various areas. Besides school, they are often active in clubs and have different hobbies on an individual or group level.

- 74.8 % of the pupils were involved in at least one club, organization or other group.
- 55.8 % of respondents were involved in sports, gymnastics or riding clubs.
- 22.9 % participated in a music or theatre club, a music school, a choir or a dance group.
- 15.2 % of the pupils participated in religious groups.
- Satisfaction with the social environment was very high: 82.8 % of teenagers had enough people in their social environment who accepted them as they are. 77.9 % of the pupils felt comfortable and safe in their social environment.
- Almost one-third (29.3 %) of the pupils experienced a separation or divorce of their parents.
- 84.0 % of respondents confirmed that they have a close group of friends. More than half (57.4 %) of the pupils had a group of friends consisting of Germans and foreigners.
- 24.1 % of the pupils had a boyfriend or girlfriend.
- 65.6 % of the teenagers could "often" or "always" talk to their friends when they are sad.
- 44.3 % of the pupils had friends who "sometimes", "often" or "always" do things with which the participants themselves do not agree with.

Digital Age

Studies have shown that the majority of young people browse the Internet daily and most have their own smartphones. In the survey, pupils were also asked about their activity on the Internet.

- 82.9 % of the pupils used the Internet "frequently" or "very frequently". For 62.8 %, television, online videos, films or series were daily activities.
- 66.7 % of the pupils browsed the Internet "daily or almost daily" or used social media; 18.2 % of the respondents did so several times a week.
- 4.8 % of the pupils did not browse the Internet at all in the last four weeks.

Extremism

In addition to questions on politics, religion and society, the questionnaire also focused on right-wing, left-wing and Islamist extremism. All pupils received identical questions. The questions were not filtered by migration background or religion.

The results of the study show that extremist tendencies and attitudes can be found among the adolescents in the sample, although some factors must be taken into account:

- The sample is not representative of Germany.
- Due to data protection regulations, no analyses were carried out at state, city, school or class level.
- Different conceptualisations were used. On the one hand, the conceptualisation is based on common theoretical models and measurements. On the other hand, the conceptualisation was based on a working definition of extremism by Beelmann (2019), who is also a partner of the project RadigZ.

There is a controversy in science regarding the administration and definition of extremist attitudes. When designing the questionnaire, we considered common measurement tools used in extremism research. Two conceptualisations (A and B) were carried out in this research report. *Conceptualisation A* contains items of scales from earlier studies that used ideology-specific items as well as items on legitimizing violence.

Conceptualisation B is based on Beelmann's working definition of extremism (2019). "[...] political, religious and other forms of extremism [are] indicated by a significant deviation from fundamental legal norms and values within social systems (e.g. societies, states) and is aimed towards the abolition and replacement of these systems of norms and values [...]" (Beelmann, Jahnke & Neudecker, 2017). The process of how attitude and behavioural patterns materialise individually and ontogenetically over the course of the development can be described as radicalization" (own translation; Beelmann 2019, S. 183). According to this definition, the items must represent deviations from certain legal norms and humanitarian value systems and be aimed at their at least partial abolition. The examination of the items revealed that, depending on the extremism spectrum, some items of conceptualisation A could no longer be taken into account and could therefore no longer be used to measure extremism according to Beelmann (2019).

For the three forms of extremism, items on the action level were formulated in an almost comparable way. Pupils were asked whether they had attacked the respective outgroup verbally, physically or on the Internet. Table 1 shows the extent of young people with extremist attitudes for *conceptualisation A* and *conceptualisation B*. The extent decreases when *conceptualisation B* is used. Overall, right-wing extremist attitudes are more common among teenagers than left-wing or Islamist attitudes.

Table 1. Extent of adolescents with extremist attitudes for conceptualisation A and conceptualisation B, valid percentage

	Right-wing extremism	Islamist extremism	Left-wing extremism
Conceptualisation A	7.5	2.3	7.4
Conceptualisation B	6.4	1.5	- ¹

Adolescents are considered risky if they show noticeable problems on the attitude level (*conceptualisation B*) and on the action level. Table 2 shows the extent of the right-wing risk group.

Right-wing motivated actions and risky group

- 9.0 % of the pupils had bullied or insulted someone at least once because of their migration background. In the last 12 months, 5.5 % reported such actions.
- 2.0 % of pupils had beaten someone damaged someone’s property because of their migration background. In the last 12 months, 1.0 % reported such actions.
- 7.6 % of the pupils visited “sometimes“ or “often“ websites with right-wing political content.

¹ The number of items measuring left-wing extremist attitudes that were included in the questionnaire and which also fit into Beelmanns (2019) definition was too low to establish a further sustainable analysis. The Beelmann definition of extremism was introduced in the later phases of the project.

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- 3.9 % of the pupils posted "sometimes" or "often" pictures, links or text posts with right-wing political content on their social media.
- The risk group in regard to right-wing extremism contains 2.8 % of the pupils since they showed right-wing attitudes and at least one deviant, right-wing motivated behaviour.
- 86.2 % of the pupils didn't show right-wing attitudes or deviant, right-wing motivated behaviour.

Table 2. Extent of right-wing risk group, valid percentage

	Right-wing attitudes (yes)	Right-wing attitudes (no)	Overall
Deviant, right-wing motivated behaviour (yes)	2.8 % (N=153)	7.5 % (N=412)	10.3 % (N=565)
Deviant, right-wing motivated behaviour (no)	3.5 % (N=193)	86.2 % (N=4,730)	89.7 % (N=4,923)
Overall	6.3 % (N=346)	93.7 % (N=5,142)	100 % (N=5,488)

Islamist motivated actions and risky group

- 7.9 % of Muslim teenagers had bullied or insulted someone because they were not Muslim. In the last 12 months, 2.4 % reported such an incident.
- 1.9 % of Muslim pupils had beaten someone or damaged someone's property because they did not belong to Islam. In the last 12 months, 1.0 % reported such an incident.
- 5.6 % of the pupils had contact to someone who wanted to convince them from their radical Islamist ideology. 3.0 % of Muslim pupils talked to someone who was part of ISIS, Al Qaida or other Muslim groups who are based in Syria or Iraq.
- 1.0 % of the pupils (not only Muslim pupils) attended events promoting jihad.
- The risk group of Islamist extremism contains 1.5% of Muslim pupils, as they showed Islamist attitudes and at least one deviant, religiously motivated behaviour.
- 83.8 % of Muslim pupils show neither Islamist attitudes nor deviant, religiously motivated behaviour.

Table 3 presents the extent of the Islamist risk group.

Table 3. Extent of Islamist risk group (only Muslim pupils), valid percentage

	Islamist attitudes (yes)	Islamist attitudes (no)	Overall
Deviant, Islamist motivated behaviour (yes)	1.5 % (N=12)	9.1 % (N=72)	10.6 % (N=84)
Deviant, Islamist motivated behaviour (no)	5.6 % (N=44)	83.8 % (N=663)	89.4 % (N=707)
Overall	7.1 % (N=56)	92.9 % (N=735)	100 % (N=791)

Vulnerability factors of extremist attitudes

Different vulnerability factors with mostly weak correlations to extremist attitudes are identified:

- Family climate: Conflict-laden behaviour leads to extremist attitudes. Young people who live in a positive family climate have less extremist attitudes. Critical life events related to parents show no obvious correlation with extremist attitudes.
- Experienced deprivation: Relative, social and political deprivation show correlations with extremist attitudes. Political deprivation with right-wing extremist attitudes in particular shows the strongest correlation.
- Experienced discrimination: Experienced discrimination shows hardly any correlations with extremist attitudes. Experienced discrimination by the police shows the relatively strongest correlation.
- Experienced victimization: Regardless of which violent crime, experienced victimization shows a low correlation with extremist attitudes. The strongest correlation can be found with assault by weapon or extortion.
- Perceived threat: Adolescents who perceive immigration as a threat tend to have more right-wing extremist attitudes. Adolescents who perceive climate change and environmental pollution as a threat tend to have fewer extremist attitudes.
- Violence legitimating attitudes: Pupils with deviant attitudes show more extremist attitudes.
- Media consumption and use of Internet: Young people who consume violent content on the Internet and believe that social Media is a valued information source tend to have more extremist attitudes.

The aim of subproject II of the RadigZ Project was to determine the risks potential and the identification of vulnerable groups. In summary, the majority of pupils did not have extremist attitudes. Nevertheless, there is a considerable group of young people who can be described as showing risky behaviour in relation to right-wing and Islamist extremism. 2.8 % of the adolescents show right-wing attitudes and at least once a right-wing motivated, deviant behaviour. The Islamist risk group consists of 1.6 % Muslim teenagers in our sample. Prevention projects must pay special attention to this particular group of adolescents in order to prevent them from continuing to radicalisation processes.

The analysis of vulnerability factors showed mostly very small correlations. For this reason, we support the thesis that a radicalisation process is an interplay of many vulnerability factors that differ between individuals. In a second step, multivariate models must be used to investigate the interaction, moderation and mediation of specific vulnerability factors. In further analyses, the focus should be set on risky pupils to explore the correlations between vulnerability factors. These results will be of particular importance for further prevention work.

There are difficulties and disagreements in measuring extremist attitudes. Basic research is needed to critically question and discuss previous concepts and measurements and to develop new, suitable measurements. Further research is needed due to the criticism of recent studies and the need to defend radical forms of social criticism protected by the Constitution.